

# The New York Times

## ART & DESIGN

### Review: Mark Grotjahn's 'Painted Sculpture' Offers the Gorgeously Preposterous

By ROBERTA SMITH SEPT. 17, 2015

Mark Grotjahn's paintings have long pitted two important strands of early modernism — abstraction and masklike Expressionist faces — against each other and also against African art, to which both are so indebted. A few years ago, to his benefit, he started painting on bronze casts of cardboard boxes as well as canvas. His latest efforts, which he collectively calls "Painted Sculpture," are gorgeously preposterous.

Bigger and more intensely painted, they go beyond the smaller painted bronzes called "Masks" that he showed at the Gagosian Gallery's space on Madison Avenue in 2012. But both shows confirm that painting on these admittedly fancy ready-mades has resulted in Mr. Grotjahn's best work since his early butterfly motifs. They achieve greater emotional power and conceptual ambiguity than most of what came between.

Tall, thin and on substantial pedestals, the bronzes suggest both masks and figurative sculptures. They have an African and also (European) medieval implacability, even though they began life as boxes for flat-screen TVs, and their torn tops are still visible.

Mr. Grotjahn has cut three apertures into each, suggesting the lopsided mouths and eyes of previous canvases. He has also affixed them with one, and sometimes two, cardboard tubes (also bronze) where noses or male genitalia might be. He then painted on all sides of these objects, mostly with his hands and fingers. Replete with handprints and crude signatures, these extravagantly textured, richly colored surfaces celebrate painterly touch while acknowledging its potential for self-indulgence. Parenthetical titles — "Blue van Gogh Cypress, Mask" — cite African masks, Jackson Pollock and the early modernist love of nature. Julian Schnabel, Lucio Fontana or Cy Twombly are also in the mix.

But it is mostly up to us to sort the shifting parts of these half-alive, emphatically made things. For example, the two van Gogh-titled paintings initially made me think of organized Joan Mitchell surfaces. The long noses of course conjure Pinocchio, suggesting that Mr. Grotjahn's latest hybrids could be as false as they are true.

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*Mark Grotjahn*

*'Painted Sculpture'*

*Anton Kern Gallery*

*532 West 20th Street, Chelsea*

*Through Oct. 29*



Mark Grotjahn's, "Untitled (The Skies Remembered II, French Mask)" at the Anton Kern Gallery.

Mark Grotjahn and Anton Kern Gallery, New York

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